

# THE IMPROVEMENT OF TEACHER EDUCATION

*A Final Report  
by the*

COMMISSION ON TEACHER EDUCATION

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON EDUCATION

Washington, D. C.

1946

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# Foreword

THE COMMISSION on Teacher Education, created in February 1938 and formally dissolved in September 1944, devoted most of its time, energy, and means to the conduct of an extensive field program. Included was a national cooperative study in which a large number of representative school systems, colleges, and universities participated, and a series of statewide cooperative studies involving the teacher education interests of ten states. Service to these enterprises was provided by a central staff located in Washington and a collaboration center on child growth and development housed at the University of Chicago. Eight published reports have resulted from the Commission's field experience and from its own deliberations. Six of these were prepared by members of the staff and dealt in detail with different large phases of the program. The other two have been reports from the Commission itself. *Teachers for Our Times* was an orienting statement of the Commission's own point of view respecting present-day problems in the education of teachers. *The Improvement of Teacher Education* concludes the series. In it, the Commission summarizes what it did, lists the more significant findings, and sets forth its own recommendations.

The present work naturally reflects the various staff volumes which were themselves drawn largely from the records and reports submitted to the Commission by representatives of the more than sixty institutions and cooperating groups that took part in the field study program. This volume accordingly owes much to the work and thinking of many persons. It is particularly indebted to the ability of Karl W. Bigelow to analyze and digest voluminous reports and to find and express elements of agreement among divergent points of view. As director of the Commission, Dr. Bigelow was assigned the task of the actual composition of the final report. To him, as well as to all others, the Commission acknowledges its indebtedness.

These acknowledgments, however, imply no lack of responsibility on the part of the Commission for the points of view and the recommendations in this report. Original drafts of the several chapters were discussed at a series of meetings, revised in the light of those discussions, and resubmitted for further criticism by the members. The report thus constitutes an official Commission statement and represents the result of a pooling of thought by a group of men and women deeply and professionally concerned with the improvement of teacher education, men and women who brought to the Commission a wide variety of experiences and points of view.

The Commission, in now bringing its work to a close, wishes to express its appreciation of the opportunities it has had to study intensively the important problems of teacher education during the critical years just past. It is grateful to the American Council on Education for having sponsored its program, and also to the General Education Board for having provided so generously for the support of its work. It desires especially to recognize the encouragement and help provided by two officers of that board, Robert J. Havighurst and Flora M. Rhind.

E. S. EVENDEN  
*Chairman*

# Introduction

THERE ARE several temptations to which men and women who have devoted long and earnest attention to any given subject are prone to succumb. One is to believe that their subject is of the widest and most critical importance. Another is to feel that the circumstances of their times call for particular attention to that subject. A third is to be convinced that what they themselves have concluded and have to say is worth especial consideration.

The Commission on Teacher Education has felt all of these temptations. Moreover, it has yielded to them. But it has not done so uncritically. It does not believe itself self-deluded. It is of the sober opinion that the improvement of teacher education is of the greatest national importance in our times. And it cannot but believe that its own unique experience provides a basis for suggestions and recommendations that are of genuine significance.

Our nation is today facing unprecedented challenges. Many of these reflect problems that had already made themselves dramatically felt in the period between the two world wars. These problems—political, economic, social, and moral—were not solved; indeed they were often further complicated, by the experiences attendant upon the waging of the last war. The end of that war has brought them back to us clamoring for solution. They are domestic and international in character, intermixed.

Our task of dealing with these persistent problems is enormously increased by the necessity of now reconverting our lives from a wartime to a peacetime basis and by the novel impact of developments speeded up under the stimulus of war. How to deal constructively with the new atomic power with which we have been presented is only the most striking of many new issues that we now must face. There has been no time in American history when greater dangers threatened or greater opportunities were offered.

If, as a people, we are to meet these challenges successfully we

must have knowledge, we must have understanding, we must have skill. We must also have sound purposes, devotion to the common welfare, and ability to live and work together cooperatively. All of these characteristics are the goals of democratic education. Upon the quality of education in our country, therefore, must clearly depend our ability to make the age now opening up a great one.

From this it follows that the improvement of teacher education is a critical national necessity, for teachers are the key element in most educational processes. Upon their quality more than on any other factor depends the quality of instruction offered in the schools, the colleges, the universities, and the educational institutions provided for adults. And that quality is largely determined by the excellence of the arrangements provided for the education of teachers. Such arrangements are not at present satisfactory.

It was, of course, because of a widespread recognition that teacher education required improvement that the Commission was created by the American Council on Education in February 1938. Prior to that time the Council had carefully explored the need for such a body, working through its Committee on Problems and Plans and enjoying the assistance of many leaders in American education. It received encouragement on every hand. Students of every aspect of education testified that their researches invariably revealed that the improvement of teacher education was a key necessity if their own immediate problems were to be dealt with successfully.

The demand, moreover, was for the encouragement of experimental action at the points where teachers were actually being prepared and employed. It was felt that further systematic inquiry into existing practices was not called for. It was believed that added specialized research would be a less useful activity for a national commission than stimulation of a testing in practice of hypotheses already developed through processes of careful study. It was considered that deliberative pronouncements would be less valuable than a series of reports based on experience in the field.

Accordingly when the Commission was established, following a generous grant of funds by the General Education Board, it was understood that its task was to be basically one of implementation. It consequently set about developing a field program. A national cooperative study was first organized in which fifty cooperating units undertook to participate. About half of these were institutions of various types in which teachers were being prepared, and about half were school systems concerned with the growth of teachers on the job. Later a second study was set up, the units of which were cooperating groups representing the teacher education interests of ten particular states.

Since the character of these studies is fully described in the body of this report little need be said about them at this point. It should, however, be remarked that each continued from three to three and a half years and that together they constituted the major activity of the Commission. The staff of the Commission worked closely with each cooperating unit and a wide variety of services was rendered in response to expressed needs. The emphasis was on local deliberation and local action and while the various units were kept in touch with one another there was no effort to press for uniformity.

The natural consequence was a program of diversified activities relating to nearly every aspect of in-service and pre-service teacher education. Careful records of experience were maintained, evaluation of outcomes was emphasized, and periodical reports were prepared by each unit for presentation to the Commission. Meanwhile Commission staff members kept in close touch with developments in the field and formulated their individual judgments as to the effectiveness of the various experimental efforts.

With the cumulation of experience it became evident that the processes employed for arrival at decisions and for carrying out of action were of critical importance. Considerable attention was accordingly given to the various ways of working together that were utilized and to an estimation of their effectiveness. Testimony respecting these matters was gathered from the field and the judgments of staff members were systematically pooled. It



was concluded that some important discoveries had been made.

When the period of field activity on the part of the Commission was concluded staff members were asked to prepare a series of reports based on the rich experience that had been enjoyed. Drawing on the cumulated materials and their own insights these authors produced six volumes, already published. These dealt respectively with the preparation of teachers, their in-service education, evaluation in teacher education, child growth and development, statewide programs for the improvement of teacher education, and problems of graduate instruction leading to the Ph.D.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime the Commission itself had published a preliminary report, *Teachers for Our Times*, in which it set forth its basic point of view respecting the problems with which it had been asked to deal.

The present volume constitutes the Commission's final report. The book is a summary of its main experience, and of the experience of the various units that cooperated with it, as well as a formulation of its own conclusions and recommendations. For the record, but also—and mainly—because everything the Commission has to say is deeply rooted in its experience, Chapter I is mainly devoted to a running account of what the Commission did. This should serve a useful orienting purpose. However, it is recognized that some readers may feel that they are already adequately acquainted with this story, parts of which have been told elsewhere. These may wish to turn at once to the succeeding chapters.

Chapter II deals with the subject of the preparation of teachers, and Chapter III with in-service education. In each of these the focus is upon action available to colleges, universities, and school systems acting more or less independently. Chapter IV, contrariwise, has to do with cooperative activities, that is, with those that involve the working together of various institutions or of the representatives of such institutions. In the final chapter the Commission has summed up. Here it has provided a concluding statement of its views respecting the importance of teacher

<sup>1</sup> A complete list of Commission publications will be found in the appendix to this report.



education and of the basic ideas that it considers must control if teacher education is to be adequately improved. It has added a summary discussion of leading problems and promising trends. Some readers may wish to examine this chapter before tackling the more detailed presentations that precede it.

The chairman of the Commission, in his foreword to this report, has expressed certain acknowledgments for the Commission. The director would like, at this last opportunity, to exercise a similar privilege. He is grateful for the guidance and support of the Commission and of the American Council on Education, for the loyal and effective cooperation provided by his staff colleagues, and for the numberless contributions to the success of the Commission's program made by the thousands of men and women who participated in the field aspects of that program. For him there can be no doubt that what is reported in this volume constitutes a heartening demonstration of the possibilities inherent in the cooperation of persons dedicated to a worthy cause.

KARL W. BIGELOW

*Director*

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# I

## The Commission and Its Work

THE CREATION, activities, and conclusions of the Commission on Teacher Education need to be viewed in perspective. The decision of the American Council on Education to call this body into being in 1938 was a response to significant circumstances in the educational world. The planning that preceded and accompanied its program was influenced not only by those circumstances but also by broader social developments. The Commission's interpretation of its own experiences reflects its attitude toward the fundamental issues with which Americans—as individuals and as members of a great society—are today so compellingly faced.<sup>1</sup>

### BACKGROUND: CIRCUMSTANCES AND IDEAS

When the decision to establish the Commission was reached the first century of public teacher education in the United States was drawing rapidly to a close. The last decades of that century, moreover, had been marked by many changes, much expansion, and a good deal of criticism both from within the teacher education world and from without. The first world war had very adversely affected education in this country. Financial support had been reduced. Experienced teachers had been drawn away from their posts in large numbers and enrollments in institutions where teachers were being prepared had declined sharply. Teaching vacancies had frequently had to be filled by persons not qualified even according to the modest standards of

<sup>1</sup>This attitude has been somewhat fully expressed in the Commission's first report, *Teachers for Our Times* (Washington: American Council on Education, 1944), especially Chapter II. Chapter I of that book offers a more extended analysis of the situation in teacher education when the Commission began its work than can be presented in this report.



that time. The end of the war found many of these inferior teachers immovably fixed in their new positions.<sup>2</sup>

*Teacher education after 1918*

The years following 1918, on the other hand, were marked by extraordinary educational expansions and advances. While elementary school enrollments began, eventually, to decline in reflection of falling birthrates, the numbers of students swarming into the secondary schools more than compensated for such losses. The growth in attendance at this latter class of institution was accompanied by an almost equally spectacular enlargement of enrollments in the nation's colleges and universities. All these developments, of course, led to an increase in the demand for qualified teachers, and this demand was made effective by an upward trend in salaries and by improving provisions for tenure and retirement. Moreover, as shortages were repaired, and particularly after the onset of the depression in 1929 caused a teaching career to appeal to more and more young people, it became possible to raise notably both the requirements for certification to teach and the standards for programs of preparation.<sup>3</sup>

A steady increase in the amount of college education possessed by beginning teachers on the average was one of the more striking characteristics of this period. This development particularly applied to elementary school teachers. It was between the wars that the chief institutions in which these teachers were prepared changed rapidly and all but universally from one- or two-year normal schools to four-year, degree-granting teachers colleges. While by 1940 only a third of the states had undertaken to require that all elementary school teachers should be college graduates, the movement in this direction was clearly pronounced. The four-year standard was, indeed, being widely met in many states where it was not yet mandatory. There were similar developments bearing on secondary school teachers, who have traditionally been expected to undergo a longer preparation

<sup>2</sup> The story of the period has been told in some detail in *Teacher Education in a Democracy at War*, prepared for the Commission by Edward S. Evenden (Washington: American Council on Education, 1942), especially in Chapter II.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Chapter III.

than their colleagues in the lower grades. In their case, by 1940 all but four states had adopted a minimum requirement of four years of college education, while a half dozen—to say nothing of a good many cities—had begun to insist on a fifth year of pre-service preparation.

These trends toward lengthening the period of preparation for teaching were accompanied by developments bearing upon teachers in service. An atmosphere grew up in which such persons found themselves strongly stimulated to complete the four-year college program and to move on to the attainment of a master's or even of a doctor's degree. Pressure in these directions was often exerted by linking promotions and salary advances with degree attainment, but this reflected as much as it created a general feeling of prestige attaching to advanced study for teachers. The colleges and universities, naturally, did not fail to encourage this movement, and the times were marked by a rapid growth in the provision of summer sessions and extension offerings.

All these increases in periods of institutional study by prospective and experienced teachers were inevitably accompanied by curricular changes. It became possible, for example, for the teachers colleges to make better provision for the general education of their undergraduates. Advancing educational research resulted in the enrichment and expansion of professional courses. Better opportunities for student teaching were provided, and more and more institutions acquired campus schools where their own students could conveniently observe and share in model educational work. As student bodies grew in size staff enlargement became necessary; and the expansion of graduate schools—both of education and of arts and sciences—that was simultaneously occurring made possible the filling of vacancies with instructors of superior training.<sup>4</sup>

It is not, of course, to be supposed that developments so numerous and so rapid were unaccompanied by difficulties or

<sup>4</sup> An account of graduate school development in the United States and an analysis of current graduate school problems will be found in *Toward Improving Ph.D. Programs*, prepared for the Commission by Ernest V. Hollis (Washington: American Council on Education, 1945).

that the opportunities provided were made use of with unalloyed wisdom. While the period was marked by a good deal of intelligent and imaginative experimentation bearing on the education of teachers, patterns of more antiquity than demonstrable worth were often retained and elaborated. As elsewhere in the educational—and not only the educational—world, specialization was enjoying great prestige. This inclined staff members in all departments—those of the various arts and sciences as well as of education—to offer more and more courses of limited focus and consequently, despite the increasing amount of student time at their disposal, to compete more and more vigorously for their respective shares of student attention. No little acrimony and a good many lopsided programs resulted. Feeling was apt to run particularly high between the educationists on the one hand and the subject-matter specialists, as a group, on the other.

The situation became particularly confused and unsatisfactory at the level of graduate instruction, both for those preparing to teach and those already employed in the schools. There developed here a still unresolved conflict between the guardians of the established patterns of departmental specialization for the master's and doctor's degrees and those primarily concerned that the candidates should spend their time in activities clearly calculated to advance their professional competence. Since members of the latter party were by no means in agreement among themselves the resultant controversy was—and remains—many-sided. A special complication came from the fact that teachers in service were rarely able to devote a full academic year to their advanced studies: practical necessity usually forced them to rely on repeated attendance at summer sessions or extension centers. This militated against the achievement of any integration of the graduate programs, encouraging rather the piecemeal accumulation of "credits" through successive courses each of which might be a relatively independent experience.

If the twenties and thirties, then, constituted a period of unprecedented growth in American teacher education, that